United Nations A/62/707/Add.1

General Assembly

Distr.: General
14 February 2008

Original: English

Sixty-second session
Agenda items 133 and 134

Human resources management

Joint Inspection Unit

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the review of the national competitive recruitment exam as a recruitment tool

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit for the consideration of the members of the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Review of the national competitive recruitment examination as a recruitment tool" (JIU/REP/2007/9) (see A/62/707).

08-29251 (E) 250408

Summary

The present note is submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to paragraph 4 (d) of article 11 of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit. It provides the comments of the Secretary-General on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Review of the national competitive recruitment examination as a recruitment tool", which examines the national competitive recruitment examination system at the examination and recruitment stages as well as its impact on the recruitment results of the Organization.

The Secretary-General welcomes the report of the Joint Inspection Unit and is pleased that the report acknowledges that the national competitive recruitment examination, as a whole, serves well the objectives set by the Assembly. In general, the Secretary-General concurs with a number of recommendations put forward, since the Organization itself is aware of the issues and has been actively seeking to address them. While supportive of the main findings of the report, the Secretary-General would like to highlight that some of the recommendations of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit will require policy decisions by the Assembly prior to their implementation.

I. Introduction

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Review of the national competitive recruitment examination as a recruitment tool" (see A/62/707) assesses the examination and recruitment process as well as its impact on the recruitment results of the Organization.

2. The Secretary-General is pleased that the report of the Joint Inspection Unit acknowledged that, overall, the national competitive recruitment examination system has achieved the three main objectives set forth in the relevant General Assembly resolutions. Paragraph 46 of the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Investing in people" (A/61/255) states that a "main vehicle for improving the representation of Member States is the national competitive recruitment examinations offered to Member States that are unrepresented, underrepresented or may fall below their desirable ranges". The report of the Joint Inspection Unit provided qualitative and quantitative data to support the Secretary-General's statements and confirmed that recruitment from the roster of the national competitive recruitment examination has had a significant impact on the improvement of geographical representation within the Organization. The report (para. 17) also found that a total of 84 per cent of managers had rated the professional skills and knowledge of national competitive recruitment examinations as being either good or excellent, showing that the programme brings highly qualified young professionals into the Organization. In addition, these recruits have also contributed to gender mainstreaming in the Secretariat, since an average of 56.8 per cent of the national competitive recruitment examinations recruited in the last five years have been female.

3. While the report highlights several shortcomings in the processes associated with the programme, it should be noted that efforts are currently under way to correct and address these concerns.

II. Comments on specific recommendations

Recommendation 1

The General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to report to its sixty-third session on the implementation of the recommendations contained in this report, in particular those aimed at reducing the length of the national competitive recruitment examination process and improving the national competitive recruitment examination roster management.

4. The Secretary-General will report to the General Assembly at its sixty-third session on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, should the Assembly so request.

Recommendation 2

The Secretary-General should regulate, through an administrative issuance, the entire national competitive recruitment examination process including the announcement, convocation and organization of national competitive recruitment examinations with clear delegation of authority on the different elements in the decision-making and operational process.

5. The Secretary-General agrees with the recommendations on regulating the entire national competitive recruitment examination process through administrative issuances. The current national competitive recruitment examination process is largely based on individual managerial decisions and informally established procedures modelled after the General Service-to-Professional examination. The two systems differ in certain aspects, however, and the Secretary-General acknowledges that critical details of the process, such as the criteria for organizing examinations, pre-screening, evaluation and selection, while clearly regulated internally, may not be sufficiently transparent for all concerned.

Recommendation 3

The Secretary-General should take concerted measures to improve the reliability of national competitive recruitment examination-related labour-force planning and to make it an integral and coherent part of the overall strategic labour-force planning for the Organization.

6. The Secretary-General agrees with the recommendation. As noted by the Inspectors, strategic labour-force planning is a new task assigned to the Planning, Administration and Monitoring Service in the Office of Human Resources Management, and the related work is still at an initial phase. The restructuring of the Office of Human Resources Management, suggested by the Secretary-General in section 28C, Office of Human Resources Management, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 (A/62/6 (Sect. 28C and Corr.1)), envisages realignment of the functions of human resources policy development, strategic planning and monitoring in order to increase the ability of the Organization to attract and retain high-quality staff and to enhance the capacity relating to these issues. The Office of Human Resources Management will seek to strengthen workforce planning capacity, including the continued provision of integrated global analysis, forecasts and projections, and support the monitoring of human resources management performance.

7. The proposed restructuring of the Office of Human Resources Management is aimed, inter alia, at addressing the concerns expressed by the Inspectors in respect of the need to align more closely the work of the Examinations and Tests Section with workforce planning, and at improving the planning of national competitive recruitment examinations and the management of national competitive recruitment examination rosters.

Recommendation 4

The Secretary-General should ensure that the identification of occupational groups in which competitive examinations are held is in line with the overall human resources policy of the Organization.

8. The Secretary-General agrees with this recommendation. The Office of Human Resources Management will endeavour to avoid the overspecialization of occupational groups and offer national competitive recruitment examinations in more general occupational groups.

Recommendation 5

The Secretary-General should elaborate and implement a set of measures to reduce the length of the present national competitive recruitment examination process, in particular the examination process, by investing commensurate financial resources in the process. The exact dates of the beginning and end of the examination phase should be set and made public.

9. The current examination process is especially long at the correction stage, for which there are little or no financial resources. In most cases, Board members volunteer time to mark the examination papers and conduct this task in addition to fulfilling their regular responsibilities. If and when financial resources are made available pursuant to recommendation 5, the marking phase could be significantly reduced, thus making it possible for the exact dates for the beginning and the end of the examination stage to be made public. In sum, the Secretary-General agrees with recommendation 5, but cannot commit to its implementation without the provision of appropriate resources.

Recommendation 6

The Secretary-General should initiate measures to ensure that an increased joint corporate responsibility prevails in the Organization and supports the activity of Specialized Boards of Examiners. To maintain the high quality of the examination process, detailed criteria for the selection of Board members should be established and the work of the members of the Board should be properly recognized in the Performance Appraisal System (PAS) evaluation.

10. The Secretary-General generally agrees with this recommendation. Detailed terms of reference for the selection of Board members will be prepared. The possibility of systematically recognizing in PAS the work of Board members, and other work that staff may carry out beyond their normal duties, is under consideration.

Recommendation 7

In the framework of the new administrative issuance regulating the national competitive recruitment examination system, the Secretary-General should reorganize and strengthen the Central Recruitment and Examinations Board with a mandate to play a substantial strategic oversight role in the national competitive recruitment examination process.

11. Although the Central Recruitment and Examinations Board has substantive oversight responsibilities, the Secretary-General acknowledges that its membership, functioning, roles and responsibilities are not as clearly defined and regulated as those of the Central Examinations Board. The Secretary-General agrees with the recommendation that an administrative instruction be issued that will regulate the entire national competitive recruitment examination process with clear delegation of authority for the different elements in the decision-making and operational process.

Recommendation 8

The Secretary-General should elaborate and implement an action plan with a view to reorganizing the present national competitive recruitment examination roster management system to address the identified weaknesses, including the integrated recruitment and reassignment system at P-2 level, and strengthening its IT and website support and tools.

12. The Secretary-General is in agreement with the Inspectors that the number of candidates currently on the roster is in excess of those needed to fill the Organization's vacant P-2 posts. In general, it is inevitable that there will always be more candidates on the roster than there are available posts. For a competitive selection process to exist, as required by the General Assembly, programme managers must be provided with the opportunity to choose from a range of qualified candidates.

13. In light of the above, the Secretary-General has for some time been exploring various initiatives aimed at reducing the number of candidates on the national competitive recruitment examination roster. One major initiative is the recent proposal of the Office of Human Resources Management to merge the Examinations and Tests Section with the Staffing Service under a new Recruitment and Staffing Division, as explained in the programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009. The Joint Inspection Unit in its report noted that the current separation of the Examinations and Tests Section and the Staffing Service in two separate Divisions has led to a communication deficit which has resulted in an unreliable planning process. A merger of the Examinations and Tests Section with the Staffing Service under one division will strengthen communication during the planning process and enhance the capacity of the Office of Human Resources Management to accurately address strategic labour-force planning for the Organization.

14. While some initiatives such as the merger are aimed at controlling the inflow of candidates on the roster, other initiatives are designed to increase the recruitment of candidates from the roster. The Joint Inspection Unit has acknowledged in its report that the Organization has recently introduced a policy to place national competitive recruitment examination candidates against P-2 posts vacant for three months or more. The first round of placements has been completed, resulting in 11 new recruitments. Thus, the new policy has resulted in a positive impact. A second round of placements will be launched shortly and is expected to incorporate various lessons learned from the first exercise.

15. The Organization is also seeking to increase the number of rostered candidates recruited at the P-3 level. For every P-3 vacancy placed in the Galaxy e-staffing tool, the Office of Human Resources Management searches the national competitive recruitment examination roster and submits the names of qualified candidates to programme managers for consideration. In January 2007, the Office of Human Resources Management further strengthened its commitment to the national competitive recruitment examinations on the roster by mandating that programme managers should provide justification for the selection of external candidates who had not passed the national competitive recruitment examination. Consultations have also begun to ensure that the e-staffing system would identify national competitive recruitment examinations on the roster who apply online for P-3 vacancies.

16. The Joint Inspection Unit has also touched on a number of initiatives aimed at reducing the size of the roster by removing candidates, through, for example, the reduction of the number of countries convoked to the national competitive recruitment examination and the automatic removal of candidates from the roster after a certain number of years. The Secretary-General will seek the guidance of Member States on this subject.

17. The Organization may effect changes in the roster by expanding the number of available posts beyond those that fall under the geographical category. In this connection, the Office of Human Resources Management has already widened the possibility of recruiting national competitive recruitment examination candidates to extrabudgetary and support account posts, and intends to consider further steps in this respect in line with the current mandates of the General Assembly.

18. As for the assessment by the Joint Inspection Unit of insufficient information technology (IT) support for roster management, the Secretariat has engaged in the development of a new Talent Management system which is expected to replace the current e-staffing system in 2008. The new Talent Management system will address a number of the concerns expressed by the Joint Inspection Unit with respect to the current national competitive recruitment examination roster management system.

19. The Talent Management system will provide candidates with greater access to information and with a tool for self-management of their candidature. The system will also enhance communication with candidates.

Recommendation 9

The Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chairman of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, should propose that the Human Resources Network of the Chief Executives Board review the possibility of cooperation, on a voluntary basis, among the United Nations system organizations concerning competitive recruitment examinations, roster management and related recruitment issues.

20. The Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chairman of the Chief Executives Board, takes note of the recommendation of the Joint Inspection Unit and will endeavour to effect cooperation, on a voluntary basis, among the United Nations system organizations.

III. Conclusion

21. As indicated at the beginning of this note, the Secretary-General is aware of a number of the issues that were identified in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit and has been working towards taking corrective action. With the implementation of the Talent Management system in 2008, it is expected that a number of the recommendations set forth in that report will be implemented. The Secretary-General will seek clarifications from the General Assembly during its sixty-third session on a number of policy issues, including those related to the posting of vacancies and the removal of candidates from the roster.